

Lectures on Buddhism as a Living Reality at the Washington Buddhist Vihara

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Lectures on Buddhism as a Living Reality at the Washington Buddhist Vihara 1

Weekly Lectures on Sundays during the Rains Retreat ' 99: Lect. 01 on 01-08

Individuality, responsibility and accountability.

a. Individuality. Yes. In spite of the functional fragmentation of a **being** [*satto*] into the Five Aggregates or *Pañcakkhandha*. The concept of a **being** exists in the

collectivist reckoning [not in any single one] of the fivefold activities of the Five Aggregates: *Evam santesu khandhesu hoti satto' ti sammuti - Bhikkhuṇī Vajira.*

That is why it is said that the idea of a self or **sakkāyo** exists in the fivefold *pañca-upādānakkhandha*.

It is the **collectivist activity** of the *pañcupādānakkhandha* which keeps the life process of samsaric continuance going through time and space [*upādāna-paccayā bhavo*]. So while the *pañcupādānakkhandha* as a totality is doing this, it is the conventional *satto* who is nominally held responsible for it [*Attanā ' va kataṃ pāpam atanā samkilissati* etc.].

b. Responsibility and accountability. This being the case, Buddhists definitely posit a link between one life and another. It is, in fact, the accumulated pressure of one life or *sarikhāra* which one gathers through **error of judgement** or **avijjā** which begets another life at death. It is also to be emphasized that there is an inescapable responsibility for the consequences of what one does, deliberately and consciously [*sañcetanikānaṃ kammānaṃ*]. This points to the individual dimension of the Buddhist theory of **karma** which says that **as one sows so does one reap**: *yādisaṃ vapate bījaṃ tādisaṃ harate phalaṃ*.

In its broadest spectrum, the **karma theory** is best presented in the first two verses of the Dhammapada [Ch.I. vv. 1&2].

As **all acts of karma are prompted by the mind** [*manopubbaṅgamā dhammā manoseṭṭhā manomayā*], the the quality of the mind as **wholesome and benevolent** [*pasanna*] on the one hand, and vicious and wicked [*paduṭṭha*] on the other, brings about upon the doer either 1. pleasant and pleasurable results of **sukha** or 2. painful and unpleasant results of **dukkha**. This is an invariable self-operative law. The destiny of beings is determined by **the law of karma**. Beings are referred to as being **yathā kammūpage satte**. Also as **yathābhatam evam nikkhitto niraye** or **sagge**.

Verses 3 and 4 assume both **actions** and **doers of action** as **real**. It is only that in terms of *anicca dukkha anatta* we assess them and evaluate them

differently. We generate no **upādāna** in terms of them. But we entertain no theory of illusion or **māyā**.

vv. 3 & 4 *Akkocchi maṃ ajini maṃ ahāsi me etaṃ na upanayhanti.*

At v.6 note the accountability for the consequences of what one does: *Ye ca tattha vijānanti tato sammanti medhagā.*

At 7 & 8 Further degree of accountability: Self-restraint and self-correction to be worked out by oneself from within - *Asubhānupassiṃ viharantaṃ indriyesu susaṃvutaṃ Bhojanamhi ca mattaññuṃ saddhaṃ āradhavīriyaṃ Taṃ ve nappasahati Māro*

At 11 & 12 Approaches to self culture: *Sāraṇ ca sārato ñatvā asāraṇ ca asārato - Te sāraṃ adigacchanti sammā saṅkappa-gocarā.*

At the **individual level**, karma operates through time and space, both in this life and in the life after. See Dh. Ch.I. vv.15,16,17,18.

Idha socati pecca socati pāpakārī ubhayattha socati. v. 15 Idha tappati ... v.17

Idha modati pecca modati katapuñño ubhayattha modati. v. 16 Idha nandati ... v.18

Karma also has its **social dimension**. What each one of us does by way of thought and deed has an impact on the world around us, both sentient and insentient.

Breach of the five precepts of the Buddhist **pañca-sīla**, we are told, results in the generation in society of **five different kinds of dread** which are referred to as **pañca-bhayāni**. This is a very clear indication of the **social dimension of karma** according to Buddhist thinking.

Its individual dimension is given as ' the doer being an evil person in this life ' = *dussīlo iti vuccati* and being destined to be born in hell after death = *kāyassa bhedaṃ duppañño nirayaṃ so upapajjati.*



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Weekly Lectures on Sundays during the Rains Retreat ' 99: Lect. 02 on 08-08

Diligence, initiative and enterprise.

a. Diligence. In this area of **diligence**, one single Pali word in Buddhist texts covers much more ground than one could imagine. The word is *appamāda*. Chapter II of the Dhammapada named **Appamāda Vagga** discusses this concept in twelve stanzas.

Appamāda as a concept refers to the area of action or activity in human life. With its initial **a-**, it implies the negation of the negative concept of *pamāda*. *Pamāda* primarily implies wasteful utilisation of time, lack of attention and inadequacy of effort in whatever one does.

Appamāda therefore connotes the very positive concept of **diligent use of time** in whatever one undertakes to do. But it is more than that. It also includes concepts of care, attention and effort.

Our Dhammapada's **Appamāda Vagga** pays this concept the highest tribute by using it in its opening verse and giving it the **premium spiritual value**. It is the key to spiritual success. It opens saying *appamādo amatapadam*. Diligent use of time, with care, attention and effort opens the door to Nirvana, it affirms. In its absence, people perish on the way. They meet with death: *pamādo maccuno padam*. It could also be interpreted as leading to the way of Evil or the realm of Mara.

Here a sense of economy of time is highlighted, indicating the reality of death which can overtake humans without any serious warning or notification: *ajj 'eva*

kiccam kātabbaṃ ko jaññā maraṇam suve. What needs to be done must be done today itself. Who knows whether death would overtake us tomorrow?

Do not mistake this as striking an unwarranted note of pessimism. It is only being realistic about the reality of death.

b. Initiative and enterprise. In Buddhist thinking, it is invariably coupled with quick [*uṭṭhāna*] and zealous [*appamāda*] harnessing of one's resources, both spiritual and material.

Our present Chapter's verse 25 presents this combination very emphatically where it says that, with diligence and zealous application, one should provide for oneself enough security in life from which one could not be dislodged: *Uṭṭhānen ' appamādena samyamena damena ca / dīpaṃ kayirātha medhāvī yaṃ ogho n' ābhikīratī.*

In Chapter XIII- Loka Vagga, verse 168 presents this with double vigour where it is invoked for the fruitful living of the religious life: *Uttitthe n ' appamajjeyya dhammaṃ sucariṃ care.* Make an immediate start, it means. And waste not a moment.

On the other hand, lack of initiative or *anuṭṭhāna* is given at Ch.XVIII - Mala Vagga.v.241 as the worst source of decay in a householder's life: *anuṭṭhāna-malā gharā.* Positively, initiative and enterprise are given as the basic stimuli for the acquisition of wealth and material gain: *uṭṭhātā vindate dhanam.* Wealth is referred to as the product of zealous endeavour: *uṭṭhān ' ādhigataṃ dhanam.* In the world of the Buddhist, it must be remembered, wealth is not a heaven-sent gift. It does not come to man in answer to prayer and supplication to the divine in any form..

The process of righteously acquiring wealth through zealous and diligent application, Buddhist texts describe as sweating and straining every nerve and fibre of one's being: *sed ' āvakkhittehi bāhā-bala-paricitehi dhammikehi dhamma-laddhehi bhogehi.*

On the spiritual side of life, this steady and constant application of initiative is upheld as a must: *te jhāyino sātatikā nīccam dalha-parakkamā* [Ch.II.v.3]. Both words *sātatikā* and *nīccam* refer to constant and steady application. Correct utilization of time is what is most important. It is through such activity that the meditators or *jhāyino* reach their goal of *nibbāna: phusanti dhīrā nibbānam* [Ibid.]. Verse 8 reverberates this idea as it says *Appamatto hi jhāyanto pappoti vipulaṃ sukhaṃ*.

It is the lack of awareness of the seriousness of time [*naro pamatto*], on the other hand, that leaves humans with many of their spiritual exercises still undone. Verse 19 of Ch.I had already reminded us of this in *Bahum pi ce sahitaṃ bhāsamāno na takkaro hoti naro pamatto*. Such people indeed have to be labelled as being unwise - *bālā dummedhino: Pamādam anuyuñjanti bālā dummedhino janā*. Ch.II.v.26

Verse 29 of the same chapter portrays the success of the diligent person, who is awake while others are in deep slumber, comparing him to a swift horse which overtakes a weaker one, leaving him lengths behind: *Appamatto pamattesu suttesu bahujāgaro / dubalassaṃ ' va sīghasso hitvā yāti sumedhaso*.



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Weekly Lectures on Sundays during the Rains Retreat '99: Lect. 03 on 15-08

Know thy own mind.

1. Mind of man in relation to his physical self. According to basic Buddhist teachings, the human entity consists of two mutually interdependent components of mind and matter, i.e. of *nāma-rūpa* and *viññāṇa* forming the psycho-physical

basis of human life. The *viññāṇa* here which activates the life process of every human from its early embryonic existence in the mother's womb [through its descent into the mother's womb or *viññāṇam mātukucchim okkamissati*] plays a multiple role in the life of a human being: 1. of being the one who recognizes, via sense organs, through the faculty of fragmented *viññāṇa* [fragmented for each sense organ as *viññāṇa-bhāga* or *viññāṇa-kāya*], 2. of being the repository of consciousness of a living being in the Five Aggregates theory as the *viññāṇakkhandha*, and 3. of being the life-continuum or life-carrier as *viññāṇa-sota* or *saṃvattanika-viññāṇa* from one existence to another.

2. Man's awareness of the world and his reactions. In the day to day living process of humans, they are constantly and continuously engaged in responding to the signals they get from the world outside, via their sense organs, like seeing a form with the eye [*cakkhunā rūpam disvā*] or hearing a sound with the ear [*sotena saddam sutvā*]. This is literally a process of being continually bombarded through the sensory nerves while being awake. This also includes the internal sixth organ of the mind [*manasā dhammam aññāya*]. At this point, it is the cognitive agent of the mind which we have already introduced above as the *viññāṇa-bhāga* or *viññāṇa-kāya* which meaningfully brings together the individual and the external world around him.

3. Humans caught up in their own web of actions and reactions. How an individual acts and reacts at this stage is his or her own responsibility. It is the totality of one's Consciousness [*Viññāṇa*] which takes control of one's decision making. We would present *cetanā* or volition as the final door-way through which all human activity find their way out into being actions [*Cetanā 'haṃ bhikkhave kammaṃ vadāmi*]. He or she alone suffers the consequences of those actions. One should here clearly understand that becoming aware of the stimuli from the world outside is one thing and that responding and reacting to them in any particular way is yet another thing.

4. Norms regarding good and evil: kusala and akusal. It is here that ethics or norms of good living matter. In all cases, the reaction pattern is specifically

understood as either **giving into** the stimuli [*sārajjaṭṭi*] wherever they are **pleasant** [*piyarūpe rūpe*] or **resisting** them [*virrajjaṭṭi*] wherever they are **unpleasant** [*appiyarupe rūpe*]. This process of yielding [*anurodha*] and resisting [*virodha*] sets in on the completion of the process of recognition of sense objects in the world [*cakkhunā rūpaṃ disvā* etc.]. This is what happens after the cognitive process referred to as **saññā** has completed its operation.

It is at this point that incorrect and unethical judgements lead to the production of life-generative forces called **sañkhāra** [or **upādāna**]. We would presume that in the listing of the Five Aggregates, **sañkhāra** follows **saññā** for this reason of sequence. We believe it is this self-same relationship that exists in the phrasing **vedanā paccayā taṇhā taṇhā paccayā upādānaṃ** [= sensory awareness leads to craving and craving to grasping] in the Twelve Link Theory of the Paṭiccasamuppāda.

5. As for the basic elements with which our thinking processes operate, *citta* seems to be the primary one. In all the six bases of sense activity, from *cakkhu* to *mano*, *citta* seems to be the first sprouting of a properly formed thought. In any process of gaining control over our minds, it is the *citta* we are advised to keep watch over, guard and take control of [Dhp. vv. 33,35,36,37 describe this as *Ujūm karoṭha medhāvī, Cittassa damatho sādhu, Cittaṃ rakkhetha medhāvī* and *Ye cittaṃ samyamessanti*]. *Citta* is said to be fleeting and rapid in movement [*phandanaṃ capalaṃ cittaṃ v. 33*]. Is difficult to guard and restrain [*durakkaṃ dunnivārayaṃ* ibid.].

The mind or *mano* apparently stores up all thoughts which result from *citta* and acquires its own character thereby. All promptings to activity springs from the mind [*manasā ce pasannena* or *manasā ce paduṭṭhena bhāsati vā karoti vā*], and find their outlet through *citta*.



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Weekly Lectures on Sundays during the Rains Retreat '99: Lect. 04 on 22-08

In terms of Flowers: Flowers and the Good Lessons they teach us.

1. The Buddha always speaks to us in very close relation to the world we live in. Nature all around us, including both animals and plants, are brought within our network of thinking. A multiplicity of healthy relationships, harmoniously relating one group to another, is always indicated. This ecological sensitivity is an essential part of our living philosophy, our philosophy of live and let live. This is our concept of *mettā* or *maitrī*. The world around us is not to be destroyed and devoured by us, consciously or unconsciously, in the process of our sense gratification.

2. Flowers are looked upon as objects of beauty, with a delicacy and sweetness of their own.

Their possession of beauty of colour and structure are keenly noted. We call this *vaṇṇavantam*. Their fragrance is highlighted under *sagandhakam*. The meaningful good words of a person who lives up to what he says are compared to flowers which have both a beauty of structure and a richness of fragrance. Note

*Yathā ' pi ruciram puppham vaṇṇavantam sagandhakam
Evaṃ subhāsītā vācā saphalā hoti sakubbato. Dhṃ. 52*

This relationship of man to nature is something to be looked up to with admiration. It is not to be damaged or interfered with. A good Buddhist disciple or *muni* is required to live in the midst of his congregation with such harmony like a bee that harmlessly collects the pollen from a lovely fragrant flower, with minimum damage to it.

*Yathā 'pi bhamaro pupphaṃ vaṇṇagandhaṃ aheṭṭhayaṃ
Paletī rasam ādāya evaṃ gāme munī care. Dhṃ. 49*

3. Buddhist sensitivity to flowers goes even beyond this awareness of their external richness. With almost a poetic and philosophic insight, they are aware of the worth of flowers as preceding the arrival of new life in the plant world via the production of fruit. There is the beautiful story of Thera Kāludāyi who describes the arrival of flowers in spring as heralding the fruit season.

He says: The trees [like the plum and the peach] in the Spring season are as though they are in flames: ***Te accimantā ' va pabhāsanti.*** For in quest of fruit, they have already shed their leaves and their twigs look like glowing coal:

Āṅgārino ' dāni dumā vajante phalesino chadanaṃ vipphāya. They speak of trees as though they have a mission in their lives - to produce fruit: ***phalesino.*** They ascribe as it were motives and intentions to them, saying that they have shed their leaves for this purpose: ***chadanaṃ vipphāya.***

They speak almost of every aspect of the plant world as being attractive and delightful to humans, if only properly viewed. Foliage of trees, specially when they are tender and delightful, colourwise. The mango seems to have been particularly so: ***Ambapallava-samkāsaṃ khandhe katvāna cīvaraṃ.*** Trees in bloom and in fruit are referred to as being a constant source of inspiration.

*Kaṃ nu tattha na ramenti ubhato jambuyo tahiṃ
Sobhenti āpagā-kūlaṃ mama lenassa pacchato.*



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Weekly Lectures on Sundays during the Rains Retreat '99: Lect. 05 on 29-08

Foolishness, ignorance and lack of knowledge

1. Foolishness - Dictionaries explain this term as 'lacking in good sense or judgement'. In terms of action, it is further explained as being 'unwise'. It is important to seriously note that in Buddhism this 'good sense or judgement' and the idea of being 'wise' pertain to **benefit** and **well-being**, primarily of persons, either oneself or those besides oneself. They are referred to as *atta* and *para*. This idea may be further explained as the ability to know and detect what is harmful and detrimental to oneself as well as to others - *atta-vyābādhāya samvattati para-vyābādhāya samvattati*. And consequently, of course, their opposites.

2. Well-being and benefit. It is also important in Buddhism to note that well-being and benefit, as far as humans are concerned, is two-dimensional. Both well-being and benefit and their opposites pertain to two definite time and space units of a here and hereafter. That is, there is this very present existence in which we operate now. Beyond this, there is also the continuance of this self same life process, but as a product or outcome of this. The way we handle our life here, for better or for worse, produces a new manifestation of life hereafter [*punabbhava*]. Results of human action and human behaviour operate on both planes, referred to as here and hereafter - *idha tappati* and *pecca tappati* or *idha nandati* and *pecca nandati*.

3. Bāla and bālya. One who lacks this basic wisdom is referred to in Buddhism as *bāla*. And this lack of wisdom is *bālya*. This is primarily traced back to **not being tutored** [*assutavā*]. Wisdom through the instruction of worthy teachers



Lectures on Buddhism as a Living Reality at the

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Weekly Lectures on Sundays during the Rains Retreat '99: Lect. 06 on 12-09

The Story of the Wise

1. Wisdom: Buddhism's Rightful Domain

Two thousand five hundred years ago in the history of the world, Buddhism had its origin with the theme of wisdom at its forefront. That is why its founder came to be called the Buddha or the Enlightened One from the very inception of the religion. It is wisdom alone, i.e. the faculty of intelligent thinking and not any degree of faith in or submission to an unknown power regarded as divine which brings salvation to mankind.

The Buddha boldly declares that his teachings rightly belong to the domain of the wise. *Paññavat 'āyaṃ dhammo n' āyaṃ dhammo duppaññassa*: This dhamma is for the wise. It is not for those who lack wisdom.

We are sorry it looks too hard. But that is the absolute reality about Buddhism. Knowing how hard it was to discover the truths of Buddhism, the Buddha affirmed that it admitted of no compromises. *Kicchena me adhigataṃ h' alaṃ dāni pakāsitum*. They could not be diluted or watered down. The worldlings who are steeped in greed and hatred which are the regular conflicts of the human mind, will not easily comprehend the true meaning of the dhamma: *Rāgadosa-paretehi n' ayaṃ dhammo susambudho*.

This position becomes still more valid because Buddhism totally rejects the idea of a saviour who promises to help worldlings from a vantage point outside. Nor is Buddhism a religion of grace. Salvation in Buddhism is individual and personal. Individuals have to perfect themselves for their personal salvation or in their failure to do so perish on their own tracks. They do not have to wait to be rounded up on a single judgement day for reward or punishment. For each one, it stretches out deverbally through time and space. One gets it when one deserves it.

Wisdom is basically the product of the graduation process of Buddhism. Wisdom is not necessarily part of the genetic structure one gets at birth as a gift from one's parents. It is developed in the process of one's living. This development, of course, could be carried through one's life process, from birth to birth, stretching from the past to the present and so on. Lack of wisdom immediately implies a very low level of human development, approximating quite often to the lower levels of animal existence, with one's brain developed to no more than reptilean or mamalian levels.

2. Landmarks of wisdom development

Buddhism clearly indicates a three-tiered process of wisdom development in the humans. It is one of gradual ascending order. It picks up the wordlings at the very down-to-earth ground level of the average worldling or *puthujjana*. But every convert to the new creed must necessarily show his faith or willingness to trust the Buddha as one's spiritual master. He is the point at which one must begin one's Buddhist religious career. This happens on listening to the master as he starts giving his teaching to the world. *So dhammam suṇāti dhamm sutvā tathāgate saddham paṭilabhati*. That is the one and only implication of one taking refuge in the Buddha and his teaching - *Buddham saraṇaṃ gacchāmi* and *dhammaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*. This first stage of learning the new teaching is referred to as the *pariyatti sāsana* or the first stage of religiousness as learning and acquiring the scriptural tradition. At no stage in the history of religion can one ignore or bypass it.

It is from this first stage of acquainting oneself with one's scriptural tradition that one gathers the first harvest of religious wisdom. It is that which prepares the way for upward religious growth. It is preparatory in that it requires, specifically in the Buddhist tradition, that one acquires and assimilates into one's life various patterns of life experiences. This goes under the name of growth in morality or *sīla*. Perfection of morality is not an end in itself. It is only a means to an end. It is preparatory control or mastery over one's physical personality. All these imply

training or disciplining of oneself and the process goes under different names as *sikkhā* and *bhāvanā*. These are words, without a knowledge of their meaning no matter in what language, there can be no real Buddhist culture or religious growth.

This prepares one to have better control over one's mind or *citta*. By then one has already acquired personal restraint with regard to respect for all forms of life besides oneself. The right of others to live, the right of others to own their legitimately acquired possessions are some of the basic considerations thus acquired through *sīla*. The basic precepts of *pañcasīla* require three more which include propriety of sexual behaviour, honesty and abstinence from the use of alcohol and drugs. Our Dhammapada refers to this restraint as a high quality virtue of the wise man that he restrains himself: *attānaṃ damayanti paṇḍitā*. Dhp. v. 80. The person who is referred to as a wise man has acquired such a composure that he is not easily ruffled by praise or blame: *Evaṃ nindāpasamsāsu na samiñjanti paṇḍitā*. Dhp. v. 81. His deep knowledge of the dhamma keeps him calm like a lake without a ripple on its surface: *Yathā 'pi rahado gambhīro vippasanno anāvilo Evaṃ dhammāni sutvāna vippsīdanti paṇḍitā*. Dhp. v. 82

